

**(Fort Lauderdale, FL)** Today, Congressman Alcee L. Hastings (D-Miramar) recognized the importance of National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day in the ongoing effort to address the HIV/AIDS crisis. This year marks the 11<sup>th</sup> anniversary of National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, which aims to raise awareness of HIV/AIDS, increase involvement, encourage regular testing for HIV/AIDS, and ensure access to treatment for individuals living with HIV/AIDS within Black communities.

“National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day reminds us of the devastating impact HIV/AIDS continues to have on our families, friends, and communities. While African Americans represent approximately 12 percent of the United States population, they account for almost half (46 percent) of all people living with HIV/AIDS nationwide as well as almost half (45 percent) of new infections each year. It is clear that African Americans continue to face the most severe HIV/AIDS burden and that we must do better.

“It is up to us to take responsibility for our health. Screening remains a key prevention tool and the first step to getting treatment. In fact, one in five individuals is unaware that they have HIV/AIDS, which means that they are more likely to spread it to others. In addition, due to various other factors including stigma, poverty, and limited access to health care, African Americans not only suffer from disproportionately high rates of HIV/AIDS, but other sexually transmitted infections (STIs) as well.

“HIV/AIDS is a serious community health challenge that requires a community solution in every sense. I commend the Strategic Leadership Council, as well as the Alliances for Quality Education, Inc., Healthy Black Communities, Inc., My Brother's Keeper, Inc., Multi-Cultural Addictions Network, Inc., National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS, and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for all that they have done, and continue to do, to spread the message of National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day all year round and help stem the tide of HIV/AIDS in this country.

“I, too, remain committed to doing my part to help make sure that individuals have access to the testing and treatment services that they need and deserve. That is why I plan to soon reintroduce my legislation, the *Increasing Access to Voluntary Screening for HIV/AIDS and STIs Act*, which establishes a broad policy for voluntary HIV/AIDS and STI screening that focuses on historically underrepresented communities.”

Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day was founded in 1999 by Concerned Black Men, Inc. of Philadelphia, Health Watch Information and Promotion Services, Inc., Jackson State University's Mississippi Urban Research Center, the National Black Alcoholism and Addictions Council, and National Black Leadership Commission on AIDS together with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). For more information on National Black HIV/AIDS Awareness Day, please visit [www.blackaidsday.org](http://www.blackaidsday.org).

*Congressman Alcee L. Hastings represents Florida's 23<sup>rd</sup> Congressional district. He is a senior member of the House Rules Committee and Co-Chairman of the U.S. Helsinki Commission.*

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